X.

TRUTH IN THE HOUSEHOLD:

A SERMON

PREACHED BY APPOINTMENT

BEFORE THE

General Assembly

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

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BY THE

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TRUTH IN THE HOUSEHOLD.

Acts xi. 14.

Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

This passage will be recognized as a part of the narrative of the visit of Peter to the house of Cornelius, the Centurion, as given by himself to his brethren in Jerusalem, after his return from Cesarea. We may take it, with propriety, as I suppose, as a description of the particular work which he had been commissioned on that occasion to perform.

In one aspect of it, this work was the most important and the most imposing which Peter, or any of his associates in the ministry, was ever called upon to perform; for it was the laying of the first stone of the Christian Church on Gentile ground. It was the formal and authoritative breaking down of that middle wall of partition, which had heretofore divided the circumcision from the uncircumcision, and the incorporation into the commonwealth of Israel of those attainted branches of the human race which lay outside of the enclosure of the Abrahamic seed; and so, the significant attestation of the arrival of the

epoch, when the promise which had so long held in its bosom the world's hope—the promise that in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth should be blessed, was to be fulfilled. It was the solemn act of enfeoffment by which the King, enthroned on the holy hill of Zion, was visibly invested with the proprietorship of the domain conveyed to him in the eternal decree, "Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." It was the fall of the first stronghold of the false gods before the power of Jesus—an event, which, like the miraculous overthrow of the walls of Jericho, gave sure token to the Lord's host, that the land upon which they had entered had been given into their hands. It was the first flush of the "day-spring from on high," quivering along the dark horizon of Paganism, over which the shadows of two thousand years had gathered. It was the first majestic revolution of that prophetic "stone cut out of the mountain without hands," which was destined to crush in pieces the emblems of Satanic domination, till, as the great mountain filling the whole earth, it symbolized the universal triumph of the kingdom of the God of heaven. It was the type of that wondrous process of conversion, which, starting from this point, like a river from its sequestered source, was to roll on, as the Spirit guided it, from land to land, till the broad sweep of its influences touched the boundaries of the world; and nations and continents, which Peter and his associates, if they

knew at all, knew only as the shadowy images revealed to them in Apocalyptic visions, were embraced and redeemed by its purifying sway. It was a work which was the prognostic and the germ of all the changes and all the achievements which Christianity has wrought, for God's praise and man's good, from that day to this; nay, of all those which Christianity, according to the sure word of prophecy, is to work in our earth till the end of time. It was a work, I say, in this view of it, important and imposing in the highest degree; a work as important and imposing as the utility and the grandeur of the results which it involved and foreshadowed; a work which we may well believe was contemplated by the angels, "who desire to look into these things," with a joy not inferior to that which inspired their acclamations at the birth-hour of the first heavens and the first earth.

And yet, in another aspect of it, how humble, how unostentatious, how insignificant even, this work appears! You may look at the actors in it, and what have you? Peter, an obscure Jew, who only a few years before had plied the oar and cast the net in inglorious toil upon the sea of Galilee; and now, a scarcely less obscure teacher of a sect of religionists, too scanty yet to attract attention from the world; coming in unpretending state from the house of a tanner in Joppa to the quarters of a soldier in Cesarea; and Cornelius, that soldier, a subaltern officer in the Roman army, elevated probably by dint of a brave spirit and a good sword, from his original

degradation in the ranks, to the post of a captain of a hundred men; and now serving his sovereign at a remote station, in an unimportant province, on the frontiers of the empire. These, and a few attendants, even less note-worthy, make up the parties to the transaction.

And then you may look at the scene, and what have you? A private house; a poor man's homestead; the quiet domicil of a little family, undistinguishable probably in its plainness from ten thousand others, where the common people dwelt in that populous city;—the peaceful domestic retreat, hidden from the public eye, where the mother rocked her infant's cradle, and the child frolicked in its glee, and the man of war came back from the toils of the camp and the perils of the campaign, to surround him with the endearments of home, and soften his spirit with the joys of the husband and father.

And then you may look at the nature of the procedure—the character of the work, for which the interview of these parties in this scene was brought about, and what have you? A telling of words; the recital of a story; the communication of intelligence; an exposition of Christian fact and doctrine, rising in its style but little above the simplicity of colloquial address; a narrative and an exhortation, adjusted to the homely proprieties of the fireside circle, rather than to the more ambitious ones of the orator's rostrum, or the rabbi's desk. It was a spectacle which recalls to our minds that one which had been seen

in the house of the villagers of Bethany, where many sat at the feet of Jesus and heard his word. The apostle here, like his Master there, appears as the guest in an humble dwelling, and reclining with the inmates under the tranquil shade of their roof-tree, opens to them, in familiar talk, the wondrous tidings of the great salvation. There is almost nothing to remind us that it is the prophet, the august ambassador of God, who is speaking. There is almost nothing to remind us that the Peter in Cornelius's house is the same Peter, who, in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, had stood up before the mighty multitude which the miracle of the descending Spirit had called together, and, with the lustre of the tongue of fire still burning about his brow, had preached to them that Jesus the crucified was both Lord and Christ, and that remission of sins was to be obtained only in his name—till the cry went up from the convicted crowd, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" There is nothing here of rhetorical art; no studied declamation; no pomp and circumstance of oratorical craft; no dramatic trickery; no parade of costume; no adjuncts of furniture and drapery; no stage-effect of platform or pulpit, to give a factitious emphasis to the message; nothing but the plain statements of a sincere man, come with the faith of Jesus and the love of sinners in his heart, to tell to an humble household, in the privacy of their home, words by which they might be saved.

The man, the spot, the act—how common-place are

all! And yet it was by just these common-place means that God had determined to effect those grand results which have been indicated in the other aspect of Peter's work at Cesarea. The time having come in the divine plan, when the law was to go forth out of Zion, when the kingdoms of this world were to be gathered into the kingdom of Christ, we have set before us here, in these means, the apparatus ordained by the author of the enterprise for the execution of his purpose.

And now, I ask, brethren, ought not the Church, enlisted as she is by her very constitution in this great enterprise, to learn a lesson from this peculiar procedure, endorsed as it is so signally by the Head of the Church? When she would interpret her commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," ought she not to let her interpretation follow, in all its ramifications, the track of apostolic example, and sanction the use of all the instrumentalities employed in apostolic practice? Ought she not to construe the preaching of the gospel into an exercise which shall cover the act of Peter coming to the homestead of Cornelius, and telling him words by which he and all his house should be saved, as well as the act of Peter addressing the congregation in a synagogue, or haranguing the populace from Solomon's porch? Ought she not to call into her service a ministry for the family, as well as one for the pastoral charge and the missionary field?

It is certainly a most significant fact, and one

which the supervisors of the evangelic enterprise ought distinctly to mark, that the first movement made under the auspices of the Holy Ghost, towards the propagation of Christianity in the world, outside of the Jewish nation, was made in the precise direction, and in the precise form in which we here find it to have been made. And I beg the attention of this Assembly, while I briefly point out two principles at least, which I conceive to be of vital importance, involved in the significance of this fact.

The first is this, that *the indoctrination of the household is a fundamental process in the work of converting the world.*

I am aware, brethren, that this proposition is only a religious truism. But truisms, merely because they are truisms, need sometimes to be the more formally stated and established.

The indoctrination of the household, I say, is fundamental in this work; because the household makes the man, just as the mint makes the coin. The man has received, for the most part, when he passes from under the domestic regimen, the stamp which is to give him his value ever after; and society has then only to take him and use him for what he is worth.

The design of the family, in God's purpose, beyond all question, was to minister to the Church; to furnish a family, a godly seed, for himself. It is specifically his nursery, established for the training up of the immortal spirits whom he would make the heirs of salvation. It is an institute, created by the

same electing love which once upon earth uttered those gracious words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." It is a divinely constituted organism by which the Holy Spirit takes hold of and enlists the tenderest and strongest affections of our nature in the work of bringing the chosen subjects of his grace out of the corruption of their native state, by a new birth, into the new life of the sons of God.

During that brief golden age in the history of our earth, in which the Creator could say of everything which he had made, "Lo, all is very good"—so far as the human race had part in the approving judgment, it was the *human race under the form of a family*. And when to this race, fallen and accursed, the promise of a redemption was proffered, the terms of it, linking the fulfilment to the appearing of a future seed of the woman, still brought the *family institution, with which that event was necessarily connected*, into honourable prominence; still taught that as the Church began in the family, through the medium of the family it was to be restored and perpetuated.

And then baptism, with all its other meanings, means this too: that He who made the covenant which secures the existence and conservation of the Church in the world, arranged it as a part of his scheme, that through the family the result contemplated in that covenant was to be attained. In every administration of that blessed ordinance, God is indi-

cating to his servants the point where their labours for the extension of his kingdom are to begin. He is telling them that whatever other portions of the great field of the world they may be engaged in cultivating, they must not overlook that humble one which lies around their firesides; that wherever else from earth's huge mountain-ranges, or deep plutonic caverns, they dig the massive blocks for His palace, they must not forget the "polished corner-stones" that lie buried in the seclusion of the domestic mine. He is saying to them, Here in your homes are facilities for converting souls to Christ; here are opportunities for instilling the truth, implanting the principles, applying the motives, securing the grace, with which the gift of saving faith is connected, such as can be found nowhere else; facilities and opportunities which if suffered to pass unimproved are lost for ever; the very neglect of them, by a sort of retributive ordering of Providence, creating disabilities and obstructions which make the recurrence of them impossible.

But I forbear argument on this point. I speak to the representatives of a Church which, from its first emergence from the eclipse of Papal error, has sent the Catechism with the Bible into the family; has taught that worship in the family is God's ordinance, no less than worship in the sanctuary; and has enjoined upon the family the observance of baptism, not as a sacramental charm, but as a sign and seal of benefits, promised only in connection with faithful domestic tutelage and government.

Let me come to the application of the principle. The indoctrination of the family, I have said, is a fundamental process in the work of converting the world. Then, the evangelic policy of the Church, whatever other agencies it employs for the converting of the world, must include an agency adapted to effect the indoctrination of the family. It must originate a style of preaching fitted to the household, as well as one fitted to the public assembly. It must establish a pastorate for the little domestic flock, as well as one for the great organized congregation. It must send a missionary to the fireside, as well as one to the nations. Side by side with that line of effort which carries the gospel along the broad highways to the capitals of the land, it must institute one which, following the mazy by-paths worn by children's feet along the hill-side and through the forest and the valley, shall carry the gospel to the *homes of the land.* It must show us the counterpart of Peter planting the seed of the word by the hearth-stone of Cornelius in Cesarea, as well as that of Paul, scattering it broadcast from the midst of Mars' Hill in Athens.

This is the first principle, with the practical bearings of it, which I would deduce from the text.

And now, the second is this: that in this work of converting the world, the influence which must be relied on as instrumentally adequate, is the potency of words—"Who shall tell thee *words*, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." I present words here as the efficient instrument of conversion, as contradis-

tinguished from everything else which can be assigned as the means to that end; and I affirm that it is words—words, of course, accompanied and made efficacious by the power of the Holy Spirit—words, in this sense, and not anything else, which possess the property of converting the soul. I wish to say that it is words, and not the office of the ministry—words, and not the grace of orders—words, and not the virtue of sacraments—words, and not the magic of ceremonies—words, and not the functionary by whom they are spoken, nor the place where they are spoken, nor the form in which they are spoken, which are to achieve the work proposed in the Church's great mission of converting the world.

Just *that*, I maintain, to which Cornelius was directed to look as the source of the power by which he and all his house should be saved, is *that* to which the Church, in her attempt to save the world, must look as the source of the power which is to effect the work.

Preaching, I know, is God's appointed instrumentality for saving them that believe; and preaching requires the preacher. But, what is preaching but the proclamation of words? And what is the preacher but the organ employed to make the proclamation? Preaching, with all the apparatus which it employs, is but the enginery through which and by which the power that converts is conveyed to its object. The power does not reside in it, but in the words which are given it to publish. The preacher is the trumpet; but words

are the breath that sends through it the blast which makes the soldier prepare himself for the battle. The preacher is the aqueduct; but words are the living current which flows through it to the abodes of men. The preacher is the tower of the light-house; but words are the lamp on its top, which lifts its signal to the sailor tracking his way through the deep. Words are potential; the preacher is only conditional. The moment we forget this distinction—as perhaps, brethren, we are too prone to do—the moment we identify the power that converts with the office or the man, we make of the preacher a magician instead of an apostle, and make of salvation a mechanical instead of a spiritual process. We commit the same error as that which put the keys so fatally into the hands of the Romish priesthood, and gave them that fearful power over the conscience and the intellect, which had well nigh strangled the life out of Christendom.

In corroboration of this view, I may ask you to observe in what a remarkable manner the Scriptures set forth the potency of words. Is it the regeneration of the soul of which they speak? They tell us, "we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible; by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Is it the sanctification of the believer of which they speak? We hear the Saviour praying—"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." Is it the edification of the Church of which they speak? "I commend you," says Paul, "to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and

to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." And "as new-born babes," says Peter, "desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Almost every benefit comprehended in the purchase of the Redeemer for his people is referred to the word as its producing cause. Thus we read of "the word of salvation;" the "word of life;" the "word of reconciliation;" the "word of grace;" the "word of faith." The most forcible images that nature and art can furnish are employed to illustrate its power. "Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" It is the water that cleanses. It is the seed that brings forth thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold. It is the sword of the Spirit, "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." And then, as the crowning article in this array of testimony, we have Jesus Christ himself, the Almighty Life-giver of the gospel, the Divine converter of the world, presenting himself to us under the title of "the Word." "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us," is the apostle's description of him, as he makes his first entrance into the world; and again, when he sees him coming forth in the last times, to judge and make war in righteousness, alongside of that incommunicable name which he bears on his vesture and on his thigh, "King of kings, and Lord of lords,"

he sees inscribed this other significant one, "the Word of God."

And in all this, this magnifying of his word above all his name, this ascription to it of such an extraordinary function, God appears, according to his wont, conducting the operations of his grace, upon a plan in harmony with the laws of the human mind, and the economy of human society. That declaration made to Cornelius, in reference to the particular words to be spoken by Peter, that they should save him and his house, coincides with a general truth, embracing the case of all words. They are universally potential. They are the great converters of mankind. They are the repositories of the power that governs and guides the world. They are little airy atoms, floating on swift wings, and charged full with electric force, impregnating everywhere the atmosphere of the family, the community, and the nation. They are the representatives of things—of the facts that men have observed, of the deeds that men have done, of the beliefs that men have entertained, of the conceits that men have invented; and so, the representatives of whatsoever is accustomed to move the hearts and determine the wills of men.

And more than the representatives, they are the producers of things. They make over again what they represent. They are vegetative and prolific. They have sprung up from this or that contingency, which has introduced them into use, as the plant springs from its seed; and by the very use of them, like the plant

emptying its capsule upon the ground, they perpetuate and multiply, and sometimes with indefinite modification and variety, the things in which they had their origin.

That father, whose conversation at the fireside is occupied perpetually with his schemes of money-making, whose words at home are for ever ringing their changes upon the odiousness of poverty, and the reputability of wealth, is not only expressing, and strengthening by expressing, the sordid passion that predominates in his own breast, but depositing the germ of the same passion in the hearts of his children.

A Louis XIV. has given to France that national word, "glory;" and that word at this hour probably is operating like volcanic fire in the heart of French society, is exerting an incalculable influence upon the character of the French people, and the policy of the French goverment.

The world is soon, as we suppose, to witness that marvel of modern science, the union of the Eastern and Western hemispheres by a line of telegraphic cable. The results anticipated from the achievement are of course commensurate with the grandeur of the enterprise. And what are these but results to be wrought by words? The potency of that mysterious agent which is expected to leap with the celerity of thought across the Atlantic's broad basin, is, after all, but an imperfect type of the potency of the words which it is to be instrumental in conveying. Words, after all, are the true magnetic power of the world;

and the million hearts that are throbbing through the world, in their multitudinous associations, are the chains through which their influence is circulating, and the condition and movements of the world, at any moment, are the legitimate measure of the force they are exerting upon it.

This wondrous potency of words then, I say, to make the application of my principle, this wondrous potency residing preëminently in those words which were given to Peter to tell to Cornelius and his household, is the influence which must be relied upon by the Church as instrumentally adequate to effect the work she has been entrusted with as the converter of the world.

In order to the full and complete exercise of this influence, she must have, first, the preacher. She must educate and ordain her pastors and her missionaries. She must send forth words, with all that peculiar advantage which accompanies a living ministry. But must she stop with the commissioning of the preacher? Not, if the *words which can save can be sent forth through other and even less effective channels.*

Her office calls her specifically to this—the circulation of words. For this she commissions the preacher. For this she perpetuates and multiplies her ministry; and for this she must enlist in her service the *book*, the *tract*, the *evangelical print*, and whatever agency can aid in bringing them to the notice and possession of the public. This too belongs to the preaching, by

which she is enjoined to make the gospel known to every creature.

And now, brethren, upon the ground of these two principles, involved in this procedure, by which the Church's great evangelic work was initiated, may I not confidently take my position as the advocate of that particular organization and enterprise, in whose behalf it has been made my duty to speak to you to-night? It does seem to me, that in the work which, as the supreme council of the Presbyterian Church, you have committed to your Board of Publication, you are following with unusual precision in the wake of apostolic precedent. I see repeated, with almost literal exactness, in the species of labour assigned to that institution, the errand of Peter to Cornelius. And were I to select a definition of the distinctive function which has been prescribed to it, I would adopt the very formula which defines that errand: "Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved."

I point to this history of the opening of the evangelic enterprise, *by the telling of words in the homestead of the soldier of Cesarea*, as a warrant for the originating and sustaining of this institution. And I see not how, in this age of the printing-press, we could pretend to have approached a compliance with the Lord's command to preach his gospel, if we were not enlisting the services of some such agent.

You preach the gospel by a body of men duly ordained to the work. You educate your ministers.

You distribute your pastors among your congregations. You send forth your missionaries to the foreign and domestic fields. And all this is well—this is carrying out the Lord's command. You cannot go astray here. You cannot exceed in your efforts the demands of the charge laid upon you by the Head of the Church, nor the requirements of a world lying in wickedness.

But you can preach also by the press, by the published page; and *can*, here, becomes *ought*. The ability to act makes it your duty to act. Your preaching apparatus would become incomplete, were there no Board of Publication standing side by side with your institutions for raising up and sending forth a ministry. There would be a source of influence legitimately bearing upon the work you are engaged in, which you had failed to secure for your Master's cause. There would be a light missing, a Pleiad lost in the cluster of luminaries, which you had kindled for the irradiation of a benighted world.

The Board of Publication, I repeat it, does seem to me, with remarkable minuteness—in its peculiar line of operation, in the production of the religious book, and the circulation of it by a band of colporteurs—to meet and satisfy the terms of that precedent which the Holy Ghost has authoritatively set before the Church here, in this first planting of Christianity upon Pagan soil. It aims to operate upon the very same field, and to employ the very same power.

The precedent says: "Go to the family. Tell to the household, words which can save them. While the

ambassadors of Christ are beseeching men in the mass to be reconciled to God; while the prophet is prophesying in the valley of dry bones, and the priest is weeping between the porch and the altar, let the humbler evangelist seek out the man in the unit, the group in the homestead, and deposit there, in these organic centres of the social body, the converting leaven of gospel truth!"

And this the Board of Publication is labouring to do. It is emphatically the apostle of the family—the counsellor, the monitor, the instructor of the home. Its mission lies apart from the scenes where the crowd resorts, and in the seclusion of the domestic sanctuary, at the genial fireside, in the quiet closet, or by the thoughtful sick-bed, it seeks to utter in a still small voice the messages of God, and to invoke upon its auditors the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

And then, the precedent says: "Tell them words. Find here the power which is to convert. Draw your weapons from this armoury. Under this sign conquer; not by the might of man's wisdom, but by the energy of the truth; not by the authority of an office, or a rite, but by the force of inspired doctrine, bring the world to the obedience of the faith!"

And this too, most exactly the Board of Publication is labouring to do. Whatever advantages incident to other evangelic agencies as to the mode of communication it may lack, it is on a level with the best of them, as to the directness with which it employs, and the extent to which it commands, the element in which

resides the potency of them all. It is a hundred-handed producer, and disseminator of words. It subsidizes art and genius, it gathers in the acquisitions of experience and learning, it engages the contributions of the wisest heads, and the purest hearts that the world has furnished, to aid it in the work of expounding and applying God's truth; and then with the things new and old, thus brought forth from the treasury of inspiration, thrown upon its comely pages, it proceeds through a thousand channels to introduce them to the public eye and ear. Precisely what Peter carried to the house of Cornelius it is carrying to the houses of the twenty-seven million inhabitants of this great land. And if the words which Peter told to Cornelius were able to save him and his family, what a harvest of converted souls may we hope to see gathered into the kingdom of our Lord, through the power of these same words, told by the volumes of our Board of Publication!

And here I might rest my cause. In showing the coincidence of its scheme of operation with apostolic practice, I have shown the legitimacy of the claim of this institution to be considered a part of the Missionary apparatus of the Church. I have shown that in its principles and policy, it is acting unequivocally under a divine warrant. I have shown that intrinsically, it possesses the properties, and exhibits the guaranties of success, that belong to the grand converting process of the new dispensation, inaugurated

by the Saviour of the world, the preaching of the gospel.

But I feel that I have but half delivered myself of my testimony. On other grounds than these general ones, on grounds special and peculiar to the times and the scenes in which we live, I would build another argument, and urge another plea for this cause. And I would press my proposition beyond the point of the mere legitimacy of the enterprise, beyond that even of its utility, and claim for it all the importance of a necessary and indispensable institution.

I make this claim, first, in view of the demand for a religious literature, which is created by the excessive issue of irreligious publications, which is pouring from the press at the present day. Our country is deluged, almost without a figure, deluged; our homes are overrun with words which do not save; with words which too certainly tend only to damn; and we want a counteracting agent to neutralize and expel, as far as may be, this enormous plague. The public mind is like a reservoir, eddying and reeking under the perpetual influx of noxious streams. We want a healer, like Elisha at the spring of Jericho, to come with his new cruse, and the salt therein, to purge the polluted waters.

The evil to which I allude is patent, is flagrant. I have no fear of falling into exaggeration in speaking of it. It is too notorious to need detailed statement or exposition. The philanthropic heart cannot but ache with intense anguish and disgust, at the sight of

the licentious, profane, antichristian reading matter which everywhere meets it in the resorts and thoroughfares of the people. This matter, this poison, is liable to enter your family, and mine; liable to enter the soul of your child, and mine. You cannot tell what infidel or libertine, what apostle of vice, or pander of lust, may have insinuated himself into your fireside circle and may be taking part with you in the training of your offspring. Such agents, we know, are at this moment filling their post in innumerable homes, and leaving their deadly impress upon innumerable youthful minds throughout our land.

Now this curse of evil words can only be arrested and abated by the blessing conveyed in good words. Words of some kind will possess the world. They are the master-spirit of the hour. And although we are sometimes tempted, with a sigh, to echo the old plaint of Solomon, "of making many books there is no end," yet as grave observers of facts, we must see that books will continue to be made, and that the only way to counteract the power of evil ones, is to expand and apply assiduously the power of good ones. The enemy's craft, with all our opposition, will strew the tares abundantly enough through the field; and if, as better workers than he, we do not preoccupy the ground with the precious wheat, assuredly the tares will possess it all. In this necessary effort the Board of Publication is an efficient labourer; and the exigency is too alarming to make it safe to spare the services of a single helper.

Again, we want a producer of a religious literature which shall be independent of those considerations and influences that are proper to publishing, *as a trade.* We want a producer that shall furnish matter, not with an eye to the market, but with an eye to the interests of Christ's kingdom; which shall make books, not to make money, but to win souls to the Saviour. We want an agent who shall tell us words because they are words which will save, not because they are words which will sell, which will pay. If a religious literature is needed, it is obviously requisite that the business of providing it should be under the control of those who are animated by the motives and directed by the principles of religion, not of those who consult only questions of profit and loss, and who are influenced only by the bearings of commercial policy. It is our pleasure to know that there are many private publishers in our country who have not sacrificed the love of truth to their zeal for gain, and who have laid the public under weighty obligations, by their contributions to our stock of sound religious works. But it is undeniable still, that the only security which the Church can have that the press will produce such a literature as in her judgment the community needs; such a literature as shall contain in it only words that save, and all the words that are essential to save, consists in her enlisting in the work of publication a press whose supervisors shall act under the pure motion of the Spirit of God, and without constraint or bias from the spirit of Mammon.

The words that save will not always be those which the popular taste calls for. "The time will come," says Paul, "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." For such a time, and such times have not ceased to come, we want a purveyor of religious reading which can afford to violate the popular taste; to contravene the fashion; to throw into society the volume and the tract that speak the mind of Christ, though the act be attended with pecuniary loss.

And such a purveyor we have in the Board of Publication. It ensures to the Church and country, under all possible phases and perturbations of the religious sentiment, a literature which at least we are willing to endorse as the true transcript of the word of God.

Again, we want the influence of such an institution, because that influence is auxiliary and supplementary to all other evangelic agencies. It goes with these other agencies where they go; and it goes in some directions where they cannot go. It associates itself as an ally in the labours of the preacher and pastor. It not only repeats and confirms his teaching, but it helps to educate a people up to that point where they become interested and intelligent hearers of the gospel. Theological doctrine, read at home, creates an aptness of mind to relish and digest the theological doctrine proclaimed from the pulpit. Every minister knows that he is making a confession which augurs ill for the

success of his public instructions, when he says, "I have a congregation who never read." "What good does all your theology do you?" said an Englishman to the Scotchman, Hugh Miller. "Independently altogether of religious considerations," was the reply, "it has done for our people what all your Societies for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and all your Penny and Saturday Magazines will never do for yours: it has awakened their intellects, and taught them how to think. *The development of the popular mind in Scotland is a result of its theology.*"

The Sabbath-school teacher and the parent thankfully avail themselves of the aid of this influence. They feel it to be no trifling advantage, in the prosecution of the delicate office of rearing the young for the kingdom of heaven, to be able to draw supplies of spiritual nutriment from an accredited source, to have ready furnished for their use a literature bearing the imprimatur of a Bible-loving Church.

And where the minister, and the Sabbath-school teacher, and the pious parent are not found, this influence may and does penetrate. The colporteur's feet give it a quality of ubiquity. They bear it to points where other vehicles of religious instruction, from their more artificial structure, cannot be introduced. They transport it from house to house. They make it track the settler to his cabin in the prairie or the forest. They keep it dropping the seed of the word, year by year, along the last furrow which the ever-advancing emigrant turns up. And without the colporteur—by

hands often unknown—the *book* finds its way everywhere; and the words that are to save a soul or a household may be in it. God gives strange missions sometimes to these silent bearers of his truth.

I stood, not long since, by the bedside of a sick sailor boy in our great Southern seaport, and found him a Christian—in the midst of great bodily agonies, sustained by the peace, and animated by the hope of a child of God. I asked of him the origin of his peace and hope. He had been a prodigal, wandering for years in reckless wickedness through the world, until at length, on a homeward voyage from a distant land, disease confined him a cripple to the forecastle; and, in his weary solitude, after reading everything within his reach, he chanced, as we say, to find a fragment of a book, written with any other object than that of leading sinners to Christ. But in that fragment was the narrative of the death of a pious girl, abounding with those precious words which God has prepared for the comfort of his little ones in the time of their last trial; and that narrative, and those words, made that sailor boy—there in mid-ocean, where there was no Sabbath, and no preacher, and no mention of Jesus, save in the way of ribaldry and scoffing—a Christian. Many who hear me can doubtless report similar illustrations of the blessed power of religious truth.

A book recently published by our own Board is, to my own knowledge, now preaching every Sabbath-day to congregations of slaves, in localities where the missionary cannot possibly be obtained. And I here

tender to the Board, in behalf of many pious masters, who care for the souls of their servants as conscientiously as they provide for their bodies, my thanks for this very seasonable and valuable volume. Whence, but from such an agency, could such a book as "The Plantation Sermons" have been expected to issue?

And now, I have one argument more. There is a manifest need, at the present day, for a literature which shall be religious, *after the same pattern* in which the Bible is religious; a literature, in other words, which shall fearlessly sustain the Bible, and reproduce honestly what the Bible contains.

Such terms as "Liberal Christianity," "Negative Theology," "Natural Religion," "Positivism," "Eclecticism," so current in these times, are indications of a terrible assault which human pride and impudence are making upon the prerogative of Jehovah. Modern infidelity is aiming to subvert the truth of God, not by denying and opposing it outright, but by forcing it into a shape which shall correspond with human judgment and human inclination. A thousand fallacies have been invented by an antichristian philosophy or empiricism, to relieve the Bible of its difficulties, and faith of its mysteries, and piety of its rigours; and the result proposed to be reached, it cannot be doubted, is that in due time the Bible, and faith, and piety, may be banished from the world as obsolete monstrosities.

If we believe, brethren, that it belongs to God to institute a religion, and that he has done this work in his revealed word, then we must believe that fidelity

to the Bible is fidelity to religion and to God. The gospel to be preached to every creature, is just the gospel as God has given it to us. The words which are to save are just the words which God has written.

Probably the world needs most in Christianity, just what it is most anxious to purge out of it. Probably it needs just these difficulties, just these mysteries, just these rigours, with which it has ever been quarreling; in order to make it feel the grasp and the pressure of Christianity. A religion without these elements, would be a religion without power—a Samson without his locks. The Bible is divine in its method, no less than in its substance. It is not a quarry from which every one may gather stone, and build what structure he pleases; but a finished temple, wrought and fitted in every part by the Architect's hand, never to be changed, never to be mutilated. High themes, lost in obscurity, and *left in obscurity on purpose*, meet us there. The manner of their manifestation is as necessary to us as the fact of their existence; for the form of truth is essential in moral training, as well as the matter of truth. The form schools the soul, gives it its posture and status, determines its tone, and habit, and character, as well as the matter of truth. Truth learned in a way to flatter self, inflates and puffs up; truth learned in a way to humble self, disciplines and sanctifies.

God is a truth, the Bible teaches us, necessary to be known, in order that man should be religious. But God, in his clouds and darkness; God, in his incom-

prehensibility, the Bible teaches us, is the form in which that truth ought to be known, in order that the knowledge of him should effect its purpose in making man religious. Without his clouds and darkness, without his incomprehensibility, to such a heart as man has, he would cease to fill the place and serve the uses of a God. "Now," said a disciple of Swedenborg, in the fever of a recent conversion, "now I am satisfied. I have a God whom I can understand." "A God whom I can understand," replied his wiser friend, "is a God I do not want; for a God whom I can understand, is a God whom I can make." A god whom it can understand, is the god whom the world is seeking after, but the god whom, for its own salvation, it must never have.

And so, those classes of facts and doctrines which we are wont to call contradictory—those antipodal truths, standing each upon its own adequate basis, and yet, to man's view, incapable of being logically harmonized, those declarations, for instance, which teach the particularity and immutability of God's counsels, and yet the utility of effort, and the efficacy of prayer on the part of the creature; the entire dependence of the believer upon the Spirit for faith, and yet the obligation of the sinner to believe; those hard sayings at which the world is so constantly offended—what are they all but God's forms of stating to the world the words by which it must be saved? and its salvation depends upon the retention of them in our preaching and teaching. They are God's

spiritual mechanism, contrived for the elevating of the soul to holiness and heaven. They would fail to subserve their end if disturbed. And, in point of fact, they have always been found to be just the means, and the only means which could effect that end; standing, as God has placed them, in their antagonism, or rather their parallelism, they are like the opposite bars of a ladder, giving the necessary support to the rounds upon which the climber mounts aloft. They form the resting-places and stays upon which are lodged and braced those practical rules of conduct and effort, by which man, in his guilt and ruin, mounts upward to forgiveness, to adoption, to sanctification, and ultimately to glory. Take either of the bars away, or combine them into one, and your ladder and your power of climbing are gone together.

Now, the want of the age, I affirm, demands a bold, yet modest theology, which shall reflect God's truth just as he has revealed it in the Bible. The words which are to save us, the words which are to save the Church from sloth, and secularization, and formalism; and the world from Indifferentism, and Universalism, and Atheism, are the words in the form, as well as in the substance, which God has given us in the Bible. And where, I ask, is this want, so far as a literature is concerned, so likely to be supplied, as in the publications of an organ of that Church, whose walls have been cemented by the blood of armies of martyrs for the Bible, and the motto upon whose ban-

ner has always been—THE BIBLE, THE WHOLE BIBLE, AND NOTHING BUT THE BIBLE?

With one thought more I conclude. The signal favour of God which has attended this enterprise, constitutes a reason of no little force to the pious mind, why it should be continued, and with increasing liberality sustained.

From a little germ, the smiles of heaven have fostered it into a giant tree. Even the disasters which have befallen it have been transmuted into blessings; and out of the furnace it has come forth, without even the smell of fire having passed on it. From its receipts of seven hundred and twenty-three dollars, in 1838, when it came under the supervision of the General Assembly, it now reports an income, from all sources, of one hundred and nineteen thousand three hundred and twenty-one dollars.

From one hundred and four thousand copies of eight tracts, and one small book, published in 1838, its issues now have reached the amount of six million three hundred and fifty-three thousand four hundred and thirty-eight copies of books and tracts.

From the forty colporteurs employed in 1849, when it first entered upon this department of its work, it has enlarged this useful band of labourers to the number of two hundred and fifty-four.

The originators of this Institution are many of them in heaven. The names of Green, Alexander, Miller, Breckinridge, and Winchester, illustrious and vener-

able names, identified with the history of our Church in its most interesting periods, are intimately associated with the inception of this enterprise, and its welfare and success were objects which, to their dying day, lay very near their hearts. They need not to witness the triumph of their scheme in order to enhance their blessedness now, but we could almost wish them here again, to behold what we are permitted to do to-night. And we can well imagine, were they here, with what wonder and joy they would adore the grace, and ask us to join with them in adoring the grace, that deigned through their instrumentality to achieve so vast and glorious a work!

The feeble babe they laid in its tiny ark by the river side, in fear and hope, commending it to the protection of God, for they saw that it was a goodly child, has become a man, mighty in word and deed, a prophet of the Lord, a Moses to the house of Israel; standing before the world to-day as grandly as he, that Moses of old, in that sublime hour, when fresh from his interview with God, he appeared upon the mountain-top with the glory on his face, and the tables of the law in his hands, and the cloudy folds of Jehovah's pavilion waving and towering behind him.

And as that Moses "was faithful in all his house, as a servant for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;" so, brethren, let us lift to God our united prayer that this, our Moses, may

continue to stand year after year in the faithful execution of its office as a servant in the Church of the living God, fearlessly giving its testimony to the things contained in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and affectionately telling to all, the wise and the unwise, the rich and the poor, the citizen and the stranger, the bond and the free, WORDS WHEREBY THEY AND THEIR HOUSES MAY BE SAVED.

THE END.